



## DISS & DISTRICT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP

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### **Public Consultation February-March 2018**

### **Draft Vision and Themes (Scope and Objectives)**

### **Summary Report**

#### 1. Background

In recent years a number of proposed developments have been of a scale that would inevitably impact on Diss and its surrounding villages, simply because they would result in increased traffic through outlying villages and Diss itself when accessing shops, businesses and services in the town. The presence of Diss has been sufficient to justify the approval of smaller developments in neighbouring Mid Suffolk, simply on the assumption that Diss makes those developments sustainable, even when they may not be.

As residents know only too well, traffic congestion on the A1066 through Diss and pressures on local services such as healthcare and education are known problems before any more growth takes place.

This led to representatives from Diss Town Council and surrounding parishes, in South Norfolk and Mid Suffolk, to get together later in 2016 to discuss the potential benefits of co-operating by developing a Neighbourhood Plan. These Plans, introduced in the Localism Act 2011, are intended to let local communities have a say on the way the places where they live will develop in the future.

Discussions continued between the town and surrounding parishes to agree how they could work together, how decisions will be made and how each community can still retain its own identity. In the end, The Heywood, Thrandeston and Wortham & Burgate parishes decided not to take part. That left seven parishes - Diss, Burston & Shimpling, Roydon and Scole in South Norfolk and Brome & Oakley, Palgrave and Stuston in Mid Suffolk - to make the application to have their combined Area designated for a single Neighbourhood Plan. A Steering Group was formally set up to oversee the process.

As part of the application process, Mid Suffolk required each community to be consulted and to agree to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan. It was decided that this should apply to the South Norfolk parishes as well and a year ago, through the individual annual town/parish meetings, each community did agree.

The Area was formally designated in July 2017. Since then the Steering Group has collated the various issues that have been raised over time and grouped them into the draft Themes.

Using these as a basis, the Steering Group has also responded to the regulation 18 public consultations on the Babergh Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan and Greater Norwich Local Plan, to government White Papers on Housing and the Planning Framework, and to planning applications that may affect our Plan.

This Public Consultation was to find out whether the Steering Group had correctly identified the issues and ways of dealing with them, together with how future growth might be planned for and managed.

#### 2. Methodology

The consultation document was designed to present an engaging and clear format to appeal to the widest potential audience and encourage responses. Accepting that not all households have internet access or are comfortable with responding on-line, the printed version included a pre-printed pull-out response form and a separate pre-paid reply envelope.

An on-line survey format was developed using Survey Monkey and it, with a copy of the consultation document, were made available on the dedicated website: [www.dndneighbourhoodplan.co.uk](http://www.dndneighbourhoodplan.co.uk)

Respondents were classified either as a 'A Resident', for which their parish and postcode of residence were required, or another class that included Business, Landowner, Statutory Body, or Agent/Other, for which the address and reason for responding were sought.

For the Draft Vision and for each Theme and the Local Issues the response options were:

'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'No Opinion', 'Disagree', 'Strongly Disagree'

There was a free-form text box provided for any comments that respondents wish to make.

In both formats the obligatory equal opportunities monitoring questions were included.

On-line responses, which provided for multiple responses from an address, were encouraged as Survey Monkey provides for automatic analysis of the data. Postal responses were registered and transcribed into Survey Monkey, to simplify and speed up the overall analysis.

The consultation document was hand-delivered to approximately 6,800 addresses across the seven parishes by an agent who provides that service for local leaflet campaigns. These addresses included private dwellings, businesses and various organisations.

The first consultation documents were delivered from mid-February and a closing date was set for Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March. The on-line survey was closed early the following day but a further week, until Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, was allowed for postal responses to be delivered to Diss Town Council offices.

3. Summary Tabulations

**A total of 830 valid responses were received**, of which 768 (92.53%) were from residents.

10 responses from residents omitted to identify their parish and postcode. The distribution by parish of the identifiable responses was:

Parish	Number of Responses	Percent of Overall Responses	Number of Registered Electors (3/2018)	Responses as percent of Registered Electors
Brome & Oakley	32	4.22%	193 + 204	8.06%
Burston & Shimpling	41	5.41%	477	8.60%
Diss	359	47.36%	6325	5.68%
Palgrave	85	11.21%	739	11.50%
Roydon	149	19.66%	1962	7.59%
Scole	70	9.23%	1153	6.07%
Stuston	22	2.90%	162	13.58%

The number of responses is compared to the number of Registered Electors as at March 2018. Only Registered Electors in the Area can vote in any future Referendum on the Draft Plan.

**The Draft Vision** - the Steering Group had some difficulty in developing appropriate wording. It wanted to express the inter-dependence between Diss as the market town and the surrounding villages without sounding too pretentious, or copying an existing one, and eventually arrived at the simple form of words

*"A vibrant community centred around a thriving market town"*

intended to create the sense of a single community in and surrounding Diss having a positive outlook.

Although some alternative wording was proposed none really altered the essence of the draft version, although the Steering Group will review this before committing to the final wording of our Vision.

Responses can be summarised as:

	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Vision	672 (85.71%)	90 (11.48%)	22 (2.81%)

**The Nine Themes** were not intended to detail each topic but to provide broad examples of the types of action that could be taken. Not all of these are within the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan but they do have a very close relationship to its success; typical examples are highways, education and healthcare.

The purpose was to establish the strength of feeling associated with each Theme, so that the Steering Group could assess whether it had ‘read the runes’ correctly and also to have the weight of community opinion behind it in discussions with the agencies responsible for the infrastructure and services.

The responses are re-ordered from the consultation document and ranked by strength of agreement:

Rank	Theme	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
1	Community, Leisure & Wellbeing	733 (93.50%)	35 (4.46%)	16 (2.04%)
2	Getting About	730 (93.11%)	30 (3.83%)	24 (3.06%)
3	Environment, Heritage & Landscape	712 (90.82%)	57 (7.27%)	15 (1.92%)
4	Shopping	706 (90.05%)	53 (6.76%)	25 (3.19%)
5	Digital Connectivity	689 (87.88%)	87 (11.10%)	8 (1.02%)
6	The Bigger Picture	680 (86.73%)	89 (11.35%)	15 (1.92%)
7	A Place to Live	679 (86.60%)	55 (7.02%)	50 (6.38%)
8	Sustain Local Identities	669 (85.34%)	94 (11.99%)	21 (2.68%)
9	Business & Employment	659 (84.06%)	110 (14.03%)	15 (1.91%)

Note: Due to rounding errors, results may not equal exactly 100%

It is interesting that the traffic issues in ‘Getting About’ are, marginally, relegated to second place but then ‘Community, Leisure and Wellbeing’ includes medical and healthcare provision. The high ranking of ‘Environment, Heritage & Landscape’ suggests strength of feeling for protecting and preserving it and perhaps making more of the River Waveney, while ‘Digital Connectivity’ is clearly of major concern.

Surprisingly housing and place, together with business, rank the lowest. Curiously, the greatest level of disagreement is with ‘A Place to Live’ and this will be examined in greater detail to establish why.

With the lowest level of agreement being 84%, the Steering Group can be reassured that the initial identification of issues and suggested ways forward have clearly been accorded substantial support.

4. Local Issues

A separate question was allocated to each of the parishes to gauge feeling on a range of issues more specific to each. However, responding was open to all since even local issues can be of relevance to others, two clear examples being rat-running/road closures and the future of specific locations.

The responses represent the overall strength of opinion for each Parish; the substantial number having ‘No Opinion’ is probably due to respondents acknowledging their lack of interest in the local proposals.

Parish	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Brome & Oakley	308 (57.04%)	218 (40.37%)	14 (2.60%)
Burston & Shimpling	281 (51.65%)	244 (44.85%)	19 (3.49%)
Diss	596 (85.76%)	65 (9.35%)	34 (4.89%)
Palgrave	356 (64.14%)	180 (32.43%)	19 (3.42%)
Roydon	390 (67.59%)	171 (29.64%)	16 (2.77%)
Scole	329 (60.26%)	205 (37.55%)	12 (2.20%)
Stuston	297 (55.62%)	214 (40.07%)	23 (4.30%)

Note: Due to rounding errors, results may not equal exactly 100%

Further analysis may be appropriate to distinguish the parish-based levels of support for individual proposals. Given sufficient time and capacity, it is possible to establish the patterns of support from surrounding parishes, but only for those key proposals that may benefit from further evidence.

Given the support shown, some of the local issues can and should be taken forward by the appropriate town or parish outside the Neighbourhood Plan process in order to ensure early progression. Others can be progressed independently or more information gathered to clarify responses. The copious free text comments may prove enlightening in this regard too.

## 5. Written Responses

A substantial number - nearly 500 - freeform text comments and written responses were received and it was obvious that many people had devoted a lot of thought to them.

A few of these questioned the process, methodology or means of financing and are noted.

Quite a few used the opportunity of contact with 'the council' to complain or raise specific issues that are outside the scope of the Plan. These will be collated and passed on to the appropriate authority or agency. Where certain issues, such as obstructive parking on pavements and littering, affect the quality of life a note will be made to investigate ways of addressing the causes and solutions in the Plan.

The substantial and meaningful remainder are being analysed and will be related to the Themes and individual objectives within them. They will inform and guide the approach to future work on the Plan.

## 6. Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Public bodies are required by law to include this and most respondents answered the questions. The distribution of gender and ethnic origin accords with the local profile. Respondents were aged from 18 to 85+ with the greatest number falling within the 65-74 age group.

## 7. Summary - Where Next?

A year has passed and the round of annual town and parish meetings is again under way. Publication of this Summary Report will enable the electors attending those meetings to be brought up to date on the work of the Steering Group and especially to be informed of the outcomes from this public consultation. Individual parishes are asked to ensure that any further comments and feedback concerning this consultation and future development of the Plan are passed back to the Steering Group.

The Steering Group wishes to thank all of the individuals, businesses and other organisations which took the time and trouble to respond with special thanks to those who put so much effort into their written responses. Thanks are also due to the organisations, especially the local media, that promoted the public consultation and by doing so drove up the response rate three-fold in the closing week.

The outcomes confirm the initial assessments of the issues raised. The Steering Group now has the confidence and weight of public opinion when working with the organisations and authorities that are essential to take development of the Plan forward. Discussions are in hand with the county and district councils and approaches have been made to other providers such as the NHS. A traffic study should soon be underway and that will provide the evidence of where traffic comes from and where it goes to. That information is essential to understanding how much through traffic could be diverted off the A1066 instead of travelling through Diss and the most appropriate direction in which to send it.

The Business Summit, chaired by Richard Bacon MP, has been rescheduled and local businesses and other interested parties will be separately invited to attend this. There was a low level of response from local businesses so they really need to get engaged and involved with development of the Plan.

Now that the Steering Group has your guidance and endorsement, work can proceed in a number of key areas. The contents of the written comments will help inform and direct that work.

Local residents and representatives of organisations who are interested in any aspect of the Plan are reminded and encouraged to visit the website for progress reports and to sign up for updates. Any one of those individuals who took so much time and trouble to set their thoughts down in writing will be very welcome to assist with aspects of the Plan development that interest them or where they have the appropriate experience or expertise - it is after all a community-led plan.

The Steering Group will keep you informed and there will be more opportunities for you to have a say...

***YOUR PLAN - YOUR FUTURE***

***YOUR CHOICE - YOUR VOICE***